

DULUTH AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, February 22, 2010 – 5:00 p.m.
Mayor's Reception Room
Room 405, 4th Floor City Hall

Present: Donna Ennis; Ricky DeFoe; Warner Wirta; Joy Dorscher; Ron Boshey; Toni Dickenson; Donovan Strong, (Newly Appointed Commissioner); Renee Van Nett; Donna Bluebird; Michele Gordon;

Excused Absence: Bea Kitto

Unexcused Absence: None

CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Meeting was called to order by co-chair, Donna Ennis, at 5:10 pm. Donna made a motion to move the elections of officers to the end of the meeting, after the Old and New Business issues. She also announced that Melanie Ford would not be present, but stated that she and Ricky DeFoe will update regarding Juvenile Justice Reform Update.

Motion Donna Ennis, seconded by Warner Wirta, that the agenda be changed as indicated. The motion was unanimously approved.

Introductions then were made by the commissioners and those present. Of note is that newly appointed commissioner, Donovan Strong, was welcomed to the Commission.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 25, 2010 MEETING:

Motion by Joy Dorscher, seconded by Renee Van Nett, to approve the minutes of the January 25 meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMUNITY PUBLIC FORUM / OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

Allen Richardson – worked on campaign for protecting wild rice. Press conference will be on Friday at noon at the Holiday Center lobby, street level on ground floor. Mr. Richardson brought a packet with information and what will be happening.

OLD BUSINESS:

AICHO's Gimaajii (YWCA Housing/ Indian Center) Report - Maria Danz, Development Director of AICHO, was present for this update instead of Ms. Tibbetts. January or February start dates were delayed. Solutions are in the works. April looks like the new start of construction. Project is utilizing historic tax credits, and the investor closed this fund nationwide, due to the economy. This left AICHO to find a new historic investor tax creditor. They are looking at closing in 45 days, at the beginning of April. The other issue was that AICHO did not make the three-year deadline for the federal home loan bank funding, so they pulled the funding for this project. They encouraged AICHO to apply again, for up to \$500,000. AICHO will re-apply, but won't know until November if they get this funding. Joy Dorscher asked about the amount of the federal home loan bank funding, and was told it was (\$319,000

dollars). Ron Boshey asked about the contractor that AICHO had said they had in a prior meeting. Ms. Danz said there are three parties now doing demolition work. AICHO has also hired a couple of staff who are doing demolition items. Mr. Boshey asked to get these company names on paper as well. Donna Ennis asked if it would be a good idea for herself, Ron Boshey and Keith Hamre to meet with AICHO soon to discuss what is happening and get more of a handle on how things are progressing with the project. Donna will check with Keith Hamre and set this up. Ron Boshey asked for some things on paper to verify what was just said by Maria Danz regarding these matters. Ms. Danz said she can email some paper-work on this.

Juvenile Justice Reform Update – Melanie Ford was not present this meeting. Donovan Strong is a part time worker for Melanie Ford, and the update is that we have moved into the Alternatives to Detention phase. Donna Ennis will be heading this, and Donovan will be part of this. It is broken up between North and South St. Louis County. Leadership committee is being started next month. Other meetings will be up-coming as well in the community.

Election of Officers -

Up for election of co-chairs are: Donna Ennis, Ricky DeFoe, and Ron Boshey. Each took a turn sharing why they would like to be co-chairs. Donna Ennis and Ricky DeFoe were re-elected as co-chairs! Joy Dorscher was elected as the new Secretary! Congratulations to all the new officers!

NEW BUSINESS:

St. Louis County tax forfeit land & Fond du lac Reservation – Steve O'Neil, St. Louis County Commissioner, shared some good news, which is that the County had not been willing to sell tax forfeited land for about a year, but now the County Commissioners, with the support of people in the community, voted to sell the land to Fond du Lac, and a vote of 7 to nothing has occurred. This will go to the March 2nd board meeting and a final vote will be taken. Mr. O'Neil said he assumes that this same vote will happen. Donna Bluebird brought up what was said by the Commissioners about Native people, and asked what was done about that. Steve O'Neil hopes that it will be continued that the land is sold to Fond du Lac. Ricky DeFoe asked about the straw vote that happened, and asked if that was legal. Mr. O'Neil shared that no, it was not normal, to take a straw vote, but that boards have certain powers to make things happen, unless there is a clear majority. It took longer than it should have, according to Mr. O'Neil. Warner Wirta let it be known that he supports Mr. O'Neil. Warner shared he attends many of the County Commission meetings. This County Commissioner voting includes tax forfeited land and land in trust, that Fond du Lac is trying to buy back to the reservation.

Offender Re-entry Program – Sara Carlson, Mentor at SOAR Career Solutions, coordinator for the community offender rehab program, spoke on this matter. Any ex-offender returning to this area of Duluth is eligible for these services. It is a voluntary program, and is an Intensive case management for re-entry into the community: employment; housing; CD; mental health; physical health; relationships; etc. The program is set up to connect with resources in the community. There are 36 clients currently, with six being Native clients. Mentoring program is also provided. Goal is to connect ex-offenders with positive community supports with one-on-one mentoring. There will be monthly groups as well, with many topics. Speakers that are

former clients come in as well. Quarterly social events are also done. Single most important factor is to have a mentor. Office is located as part of SOAR, in the Arrowhead Building. They contracted with Men as Peacemakers initially for the mentoring part of the program, and they do some circles for them, as partnering with SOAR, but SOAR has taken this part over now. Ricky DeFoe shared that he and others have worked with Men as Peacemakers previously but does not feel they were being utilized by the program as mentors (Native Men). This was a year or a year and a half ago. Ricky shared this to help the program in the future to utilize those that volunteer from the community. SOAR took over as the organizational part of the mentor program so that they could look at these types of concerns. Ron Boshey asked how the program finds Native mentors, and how they can connect with himself and others in the community. This program is now staffed more fully and can offer better help to those re-entering the community. Brochures were handed out to Commissioners, for those who want to volunteer to be a mentor. As to Sex-offenders, the first year this program did not work with them. Now they do. They recognized that this population has a need of services.

Polymet Mining – Spirit Mountain Authority Board – Nancy Shuldt, Fond du Lac Band, is the Water Quality Specialist for past 12 years. She described what she does as protecting culture by protecting natural resources. Fond du Lac, Bois Forte and Grand Portage bands are 1854 etc. Polymet project is the first ever copper-nickel-sulfite. Mining processes have changed over the years, and lots of people are thinking they can mine and make money from new ways. Where Polymet wants to mine is in pristine natural forest. It has not been mined before. Wetlands, peat bogs, a moose zone, areas of treaty rights gathering practices, including hunting, etc. Polymet is proposing to swap land with the Superior National Forest, and had persuaded Klobacher and Oberstar to do a bill supporting them in this. There is a lot of incentive and motivation by Poly-Met to push this project forward. All three tribes have good strong preservation programs, and this helps now. This role is different than an ordinary citizen. Poly-Met would want over 1000 acres in this prime forest area. Environmental review process is that the three tribes asked to be cooperating agencies in this process. EIS, tribal position statements. Viewpoint of tribes had to be presented to the public regarding this. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Army Corps. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has oversight on all EIS's written. Tribes have been pointing out that there are serious problems with this project. Water, air and fish issues are major. Issue after issue is present. EPA was looked at to review this. Last week their comments came out, and they gave it the worst ranking that they can give. Environmentally unsatisfactory ranking was given by the EPA on this project, which means it cannot go forward. EPA has said they will veto this project as it stands now. Investors of this project will not remain with it, with the EPA against it, and the tribes as well. State agencies are lax, according to Ms. Shuldt. She sees the DNR not being the protector it should be for the land. Jobs have been a big factor in this as well. Warner Wirta asked about how the 1854 treaty is affected by all this. Friends of the Boundary Waters have been tracking this as well, Ms. Shuldt shared. We must look at all the things that give us life first, stated Warner Wirta. He asked what impact this would have on the St. Louis River and Spirit Mountain, and our big lake, Superior.

Glen Maxham was also present to speak on this topic, and he shared how he recommended the commission speak to Nancy Shuldt, whom he considers an expert on this topic. He suggested that the commission issue a statement about how we feel about this Polymet

matter. He brought a page he had written out as a suggestion of what to say. He made clear is it subject to additions, but offered it as his suggestion of what to say.

Duluth News Tribune – Robin Washington - Robert Grytdahl of the Human Rights Commission spoke of how it came to be to invite the Duluth NewsTribune (DNT) to be present. This is regarding racist remarks that were happening on the blog for the paper. The paper does filter out a lot of things, but some things have gotten through. Robin Washington is here today, as Rob Karwath has been let go by the DNT. Mr. Washington has suspended the blog for now, and it may be brought back eventually. The traffic of this blog was high, but no one has complained that it is gone, he reported. Some responses were from the abusive people, whose comments were not posted. A derogatory term did manage to get through, however. The staff member who looks at this blog did not think the term was derogatory. A list of derogatory names was then developed and passed out to the staff. A posting was also put out, which sets some limits on what is printed. Mr. Washington has told his staff that if any contents coming in are questionable, not to post it. He considers things that are printed as a privilege. There is a filter on obscene words, but some things are not picked up by this filter. Longer term plans are to set up a register for those who write often, so they can be acknowledged and allowed to print their comments. There is no real answer, except that newspapers turn these blogs off from time to time. Mr. Washington will also be writing a column about this next week, he said. Ricky DeFoe questioned continuing the blog at all, allowing the racism comments to return. He noted a meeting in December where those present voted to discontinue these postings. He also questioned why these comments continue to make it through the staff at the DNT. (This was a meeting with Mr. Karwath). Donna Bluebird also questioned how many minority people are screening these postings. She asked why there could not be a more diverse group of screeners. Mr. Washington noted the cutbacks at DNT, and that they will be hiring again sometime. People are now reporting to Mr. Washington, he said. Donna Ennis asked if there could be volunteer people of color screening these comments. The bottom line is anonymity, Mr. Washington stated. Registered comments would not be anonymous, and maybe this is a solution. Joy Dorscher supported that anonymity is a huge issue, rather like road rage. When people have to say who they are, it changes the way they respond to issues. She also stated that one can educate ignorance, but not racism. A racist person will continue to pick at things. Joe Boshey from the community, suggested that upon registering, all be issued a number. They can be held accountable then in what they say, and still be anonymous. Ron Boshey shared he liked the discussion here and that things that bother him are racist things on a tee shirt, in the media, etc. He offered thanks to Robin Washington for coming here tonight. Warner Wirta expressed his thoughts on how some people have said that Indians are “easy to kill.” He shared how not much is done when Indians are killed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, UPCOMING EVENTS AND COMMENTS FROM COMMITTEES MEMBERS:

Donna Ennis – nothing to share.

Donna Bluebird – nothing to share.

Ricky DeFoe – up to challenge of the commission co-chair, and looking forward to the new year, and lots of hope for the Commission

Warner Wirta – shared how humbled he is to belong to this commission and in a way dreads that in May he will retire, and he has been here since the inception of this commission.

Joy Dorscher – really excited that Warner's words are going to be there for others to hear, written, and things he has done in an upcoming interview; Joy also shared her amazement that people come here to talk to us about major issues in the community and take time to do so.

Ron Boshey - shared he feels the same way, and that we should make more of an effort to speak with the mayor and the city council; He encouraged the co-chairs to attend the city council meetings and let them know what we are doing here; People are coming to teach us, now we need to go back and present who we are in this commission.

Toni Dickenson - nothing to share.

Donovan Strong – thanked the commission for being allowed to come here; shared his work with Melanie Ford currently; also shared some statistics about juveniles in detention, and his connections in the community. He said he is a Bois Forte member and active in the DFL party, things he brings to the table.

Renee Van Nett – thanked Ron Boshey for sharing how the co-chairs need to attend the city council, which she agrees with; also asked about what she is supposed to do for her committee that she chairs, Ricky DeFoe shared that Renee could call him to discuss this;

Michele Gordon – announced that she will also be done in May with the Commission.

NEXT MEETING:

March 15, 2010 at 5:00 pm

NEW PHONE NUMBERS: Ricky DeFoe – 879-3339; Donna BlueBird – 722-0051.

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 8:05pm.

Donna made motion, seconded by Ron Boshey, and all voted in favor.